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ABSTRACT

After a foreword by Patricia McGrath Russavage, this yearbook contains the following eight articles: (1) "IRA Resolution on Literacy Assessment"; (2) "Historical Perspectives by Dale Johnson and S. Jay Samuels" (Shirley A. Wagoner and Janice Almasi); (3) "Report Cards in Literacy Evaluation: Teacher's Training, Practices, and Values" (Peter Afflerbach and Rebecca Bell Sammons); (4) "Building Credibility for Portfolio Assessment" (Patricia McGrath Russavage); (5) "Large Scale Assessment in Maryland: Comments from a Panel of Leading MSPAP Developers, Hannah Kruglanski, Barbara Kapinus, and Trudy Collier" (Suzanne Clewell); (6) "A Comparison of Teacher Read Aloud Practices and Attitudes: 1980-1990" (Steven P. Chasen and Linda B. Gambrell); (7) "Reading Instruction: The Current Myths" (Joan Develin Coley); and (8) "Practical Applications: Integrating Computers, Science, and Literature" (Helene Granof and Marion Richter). Book reviews of Donald Graves' book "Build a Literate Classroom, The Reading-Writing Teacher's Companion" and of Rexford Brown's book "Schools of Thought: How the Politics of Literacy Shape Thinking in the Classroom" conclude the journal. (SR)

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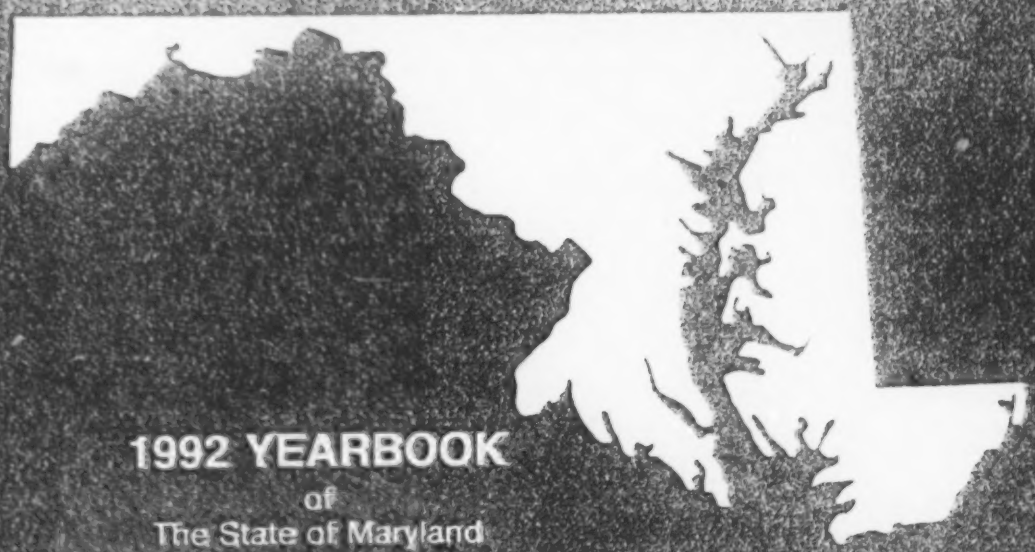

1992 YEARBOOK

of

The State of Maryland
International Reading Association Council

Volume 9

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LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

The Journal of The State of Maryland International Reading Association Council (SoMIRAC)

Literacy: Issues and Practices

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Foreword

It is indeed an honor for me to introduce the 1992 edition of the **SoMIRAC Yearbook.** This high quality journal epitomizes the dedication and commitment of the members of our organization.

As I reflect on my last three years as an officer of **SoMIRAC,** several factors emerge as having had a great impact on me personally and professionally. In my entire 20 years as an educator, I have never had the pleasure of working with a group of people who exhibit such professionalism and who are willing to devote so many hours of their own personal time to further the goals of creating a literate citizenry and nurturing the habit and tradition of reading throughout the State of Maryland. Yearbook Editors, Suzanne Clewell and Shirley Wagoner are certainly two such people. Through their efforts, the **SoMIRAC Yearbook** has become a model of literary excellence. Many thanks to them and to the Editorial Advisory Board for this ninth edition of the **SoMIRAC Yearbook.** Thanks also, to the contributors who have shared generously of their knowledge and perceptions. I continue to be exhilarated by the technical knowledge and talent possessed by educators in Maryland. We have so many reasons to feel proud. Through this network and exchange of ideas we all grow professionally.

My closing message to you is this. As teachers, never forget the tremendous power you have to influence the students with whom you work. Not a day goes by that I don't see the dramatic impact an individual teacher has on a child. What a truly special privilege this is! As colleagues in a field that is sometimes misunderstood, unappreciated, and blamed for society's problems, never forget what you have to give to one another in terms of your expertise, professional knowledge, encouragement, and moral support. Working together our problems are no longer insurmountable. No matter what challenges we face, and there will be many, I have no doubt that through **SoMIRAC** we will continue to make a significant contribution to the promotion of literacy and to the welfare of our students. I am most grateful to each of you for the opportunity you have given me to serve as your President.

Patricia McGrath Russavage
President
1991-92

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LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

IRA Resolution on Literacy Assessment

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE 1991 DELEGATES ASSEMBLY
May 7, 1991, Las Vegas
International Reading Association

The International Reading Association supports literacy assessment that recognizes and addresses the complex nature of literacy, that is built on goals and standards having broad societal endorsement, and that takes into account background differences among students.

Literacy is a complex process that contributes to people's ability to function in society, to more fully realize their intellectual and psychological potential. Literacy assessment must address this complexity by using a variety of observations, performance measures, and extended response items; it must assess literacy by the use of quality texts of various genres and a range of literacy tasks in a variety of settings. Educational leaders and agencies must explore new forms of assessment, must treat such assessments as tentative and experimental, and must set long range literacy assessment research agendas—thereby avoiding quick, but ineffective, "fixes."

Literacy assessment must build on broad educational goals that have wide societal support and must evaluate students' performance against agreed upon standards. Educators have a professional responsibility to provide leadership in defining the goals and standards. Such formulations should be developed through the active participation of teachers and students and must be reviewed and endorsed by a broad range of citizens.

All assessment must be purposeful. Two major purposes for literacy assessment are: 1) to inform learning and instruction; and, 2) to address accountability concerns, that is, evaluating program effectiveness. As educators we have a responsibility to show that our instructional efforts result in expanded literacy among the students and citizens of our nation. Ideally, the same assessment measures and procedures should address both major purposes of assessment. However, given our imperfect understanding of the process and dynamics underlying literacy and the limitations inherent to assessment procedures, we are often forced to focus on one major purpose or the other. For example, large scale testing is often considered important for addressing program evaluation responsibilities, but large scale test results have been seriously limited in their ability to guide learning and instruction, particularly at the level of the individual and of the class. Likewise, informal teacher observation and portfolio approaches hold great promise for the guidance of learning and instruction, but limitations in funding and techniques for validly aggregating such data limit their use in addressing large scale program evaluation issues, at least for the present. Because the primary purpose of assessment is to inform learning and

instruction, assessment designed to address accountability needs should not be permitted to interfere with or detract from the essential purpose of guiding learning and teaching.

Literacy assessment must respect and acknowledge the intellectual, cognitive, language, social, and cultural differences of students. Literacy responses are constructive and, hence, will reflect individual and cultural differences. Therefore, assessment procedures must be flexible and allow for a variety of legitimate responses, while taking into account the variable contexts of opportunities for learning that confront children in different settings and from differing backgrounds.

As an international organization, an important goal of the association is to support resolutions that will promote literacy worldwide. However, assessment issues and traditions vary significantly from nation to nation and across cultures. Assessment resolutions with global implications require extensive study and consultation. Since many among the leadership and membership of the Association have the greatest amount of experience with assessment issues in the United States and Canada, these resolutions apply most specifically to these two countries. However, they may well apply to other countries. Units and affiliates of the Association are encouraged to study these resolutions from their own national, regional, and cultural perspectives and to endorse them, comment upon them, expand upon them, and develop positions and applications appropriate to their particular needs and situations. In this manner, guidelines, resolutions, and positions on assessment that are more globally appropriate can and will be forthcoming.

The resolutions that follow reflect the continued commitment of the International Reading Association to provide leadership in improving, revising, and redesigning traditional assessment procedures and measures. They are intended to encourage innovative assessments which incorporate current theory, research, and instructional practice. These resolutions build upon an earlier set of resolutions which were endorsed by the Delegates Assembly of the Association in 1988 and reaffirmed by the group in 1990. Since 1988, however, there has been much discussion, exploration of alternate forms of assessment, and expression of concern for limitations and abuses of testing. Therefore it is timely to expand the Association's position of literacy assessment. These expanded resolutions focus on the effectiveness of assessments, the assessment development process, the content and form of assessments, and the need for appropriate interpretation of assessment findings.

I. Improving the effectiveness of assessment procedures and measures

Whereas . . . educators and researchers concerned with literacy assessment are effectively using sampling procedures to increase the usefulness of assessment and reduce the amount of time individual students and teachers must devote to assessments for large scale monitoring purposes, and

Whereas . . . many current reading measures used in the early grades may lead to narrowly focused instruction which insufficiently addresses the language and cognitive skills that become increasingly essential to literacy beyond the early grades, and

Whereas . . . students and educators must strive to attain the highest standards of literacy, and whereas much testing effort has, instead, focused on comparing students, districts, provinces, states, and

Whereas . . . young children are especially vulnerable to negative experiences with tests, and

Whereas . . . reducing the number of tests administered in school will result in more time for learning and instruction while conserving financial resources. Be it therefore

RESOLVED that large scale assessments for the purpose of evaluating program effectiveness, as at the national or state or provincial levels, be implemented on a sampling basis. Sampling approaches are economical and allow the use of more sophisticated, authentic tasks which often require more time for administration and increased resources for scoring and analysis; be it further

RESOLVED that the International Reading Association supports efforts to develop standards for literacy attainment that are applied to authentic texts and call for authentic tasks; be it further

RESOLVED that the International Reading Association opposes the proliferation of school by school, district by district, province by province, and state by state comparison assessments; be it further

RESOLVED that where large scale assessments of outcomes for program evaluation purposes are deemed necessary, such assessments not be imposed on learners before age 9 (grade 4); be it further

RESOLVED that the International Reading Association provide leadership at the national, provincial, and local educational levels to review current testing patterns and practices to reduce the volume and proliferation of inappropriate or unproductive assessments.

II. The importance of how assessments are developed

Whereas . . . literacy assessments are often used to make important decisions affecting students, teachers, schools, be it therefore

RESOLVED that literacy assessments be based upon broad goals and standards developed through consensus of a wide range of involved citizens, teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and representatives of professional organizations such as the International Reading Association; be it further

RESOLVED that literacy assessments be developed on the basis of the best available theory, research, and practice. The International Reading Association, through the professional talents and knowledge of its members and working with related professional organizations, will provide information and assist in creating opportunities to focus discussion, support and encourage research, and promote sound decision making about literacy assessments.

III. The importance of assessment content and philosophy

Whereas . . . teaching and learning are influenced by the form and content of assessment instruments which often have powerful personal, political, and professional implications, and

Whereas . . . there have been significant advances in our understanding of reading, writing, and language as complex, constructive, and dynamic processes, and in our understanding that definitions of reading as a hierarchical sequence of discrete skills leads to inappropriate assessment and fosters inappropriate instruction, and

Whereas . . . students in most educational settings come from varied cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds and are faced with a diversity of learning opportunities. Be it therefore,

RESOLVED, that literacy assessments be based in current research and theory, not limited by traditional psychometric concepts, and must reflect the complex and dynamic interrelationship of reading, writing, and language abilities critical to human communications; and therefore, to better inform teaching and learning, be it further

RESOLVED that literacy assessments must incorporate a variety of observations, taking into account the complex nature of reading, writing, and language, and must also include high quality text, a variety of genres, and a range of authentic tasks, be it further

RESOLVED that assessments must reflect a broad based consensus about age appropriate literacy tasks for students, taking into account the learning opportunities that have been provided for children in schools and communities, be it further

RESOLVED that to be of use in the improvement of instruction and learning, literacy assessments need to reveal change over time at the level of the individual child, be it further

RESOLVED that literacy assessments must be designed to eliminate bias toward students whose language, cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds may be different from those of the majority population.

IV. The importance of appropriate interpretation and use of assessment results

Whereas . . . the International Reading Association recognizes that one valid purpose for assessment is monitoring the outcomes of instruction at the level of the school, the community, the state or province, or the nation, and that a second valid, and distinct, purpose for assessment is to provide input information to the teacher and the pupil for the guidance and improvement of instruction and learning, and

Whereas . . . large scale assessments for the purpose of monitoring outcomes and classroom assessments for the guidance and improvement of instruction and learning, presently require different approaches and techniques appropriate to the needs of those who use assessment results, and

Whereas . . . large scale assessments do not address the question of how to improve teaching and learning and because such data are subject to misinterpretation and error when applied to small groups or individuals. Be it therefore

RESOLVED that users of assessment results recognize the importance of considering a variety of observations, procedures, and instruments; be it further

RESOLVED that users of assessment results take into account the specific purposes for which assessments are made and the settings in which assessments are conducted; be it further

RESOLVED that where large scale assessments are conducted for the purpose of monitoring outcomes results should not be reported for individual pupils, classes, or schools.

LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

Historical Perspectives by Dale Johnson and S. Jay Samuels

Shirley A. Wagoner and Janice F. Almasi

Last fall your editors put their heads together to determine what kind of article we could publish that would be truly exciting for all or our readers. We considered the many changes that have taken place in the field of reading over the years, especially in the last two decades. We wondered if researchers and leaders in the field would see these changes in the same ways. Would they agree as to the changes that have been most pivotal and influential? Would we agree with their judgments?

It may seem impertinent to get on the phone asking very busy people to respond to any questions at all. However, we hoped that with a few minutes' thought and a dictating machine, these responses would not be a burden. We were pleased when our respondents answered the questions with written responses. We greatly appreciate these answers that we are able to provide for our readers. They are both interesting and thought-provoking. Perhaps this article may be the beginning of an ongoing conversation with leading educators in the field of literacy.

We began this conversation by speaking with Dale Johnson and Jay Samuels, both well established in the field of reading and literacy. Dale Johnson authored the popular book *Teaching Reading Vocabulary*. He has been President of the IRA, and is now a Distinguished Service and Research Professor at the Tri College Department of Education in Dubuque, Iowa. S. Jay Samuels is co-investigator at the Center for Research in Human Learning at the University of Minnesota where he is also a Professor in the College of Education. Dr. Samuels is a former co-editor of *Reading Research Quarterly*.

We asked each two questions. The first was, **What do you see as the most important development in the field of reading that has taken place during your career?** Johnson responded by referring to Edward Fry's new book, *Ten Best Ideas for Reading Teachers* (1991), in which Fry reports on surveying some fifty "reading authorities." Each was asked to list the ten best-ever ideas in reading from his or her point of view. In his reply to us, Johnson noted that Fry's tabulation and discussion of the ten best ideas identified by these experts ranged from the need for vocabulary instruction to the importance of reading to children to the significance of the teacher in reading education.

Johnson noted that his answer to our first question ranked second among the experts' ten best ideas as solicited by Fry, and summarized it as follows: The most important development in the field of reading has been the importance of back-

ground knowledge in reading, reinforced by the development of schema theory, cognitive mapping and other classroom practices that foster the use of prior knowledge.

Johnson went on to say that the discovery of the essentiality of helping learners relate what is new to what they already know is, by no means, a new understanding. He asserted that the past two decades, however, have seen a rediscovery of this simple but critically important principle of learning. The idea that we cannot learn anything unless we can relate it to things we already know is so straightforward as to be describable as 'common sense.' Johnson explained that the significance of the rediscovery lies in its enormous impact on classroom practice, textbook development, and teacher preparation during the past two decades. He noted that teaching strategies such as semantic mapping, background discussion, and responding and extending are now in wide use and that as a result reading instruction has become more sensible and more successful.

Samuels' response derived directly from his part of Fry's book as well. He identified automaticity and repeated reading as the most important developments in reading. His discussion, from Fry's book, noted:

> Research on learning shows that there are two definite stages [in learning a skill]: developing accuracy and then developing automaticity. It has been well known that the first stage shows large individual differences in the amount of time necessary for acquiring a skill, differences which are often related to intelligence. A new finding is that while there are still individual differences in development of automaticity, these are significantly smaller than in the first stage. In other words, the more intelligent student becomes accurate sooner than the less intelligent student. Once the student is highly accurate, however, he or she becomes automatic in about the same period of time.
>
> What are the implications of this exciting new finding about the small differences in the time it takes to become automatic? It means that once a student can be brought to the stage of accuracy, that virtually all students can achieve automaticity, or fluency. Thus the teacher's tasks are: first, motivating the students so that they stay on task long enough to become accurate, and two, motivating the students so that they practice until they become automatic, or fluent. . . .
>
> How does one become automatic in reading? At the present time, the only way we know is through practice. In order to encourage students to become automatic at word recognition, what the teacher should do is to encourage students to read as much easy material as possible. In reading as in other matters, 'practice makes perfect.'
>
> A proven technique for building automaticity is to use the method of repeated reading. This method simply has the student read and reread a short story or part of a story until it can be read with some degree of speed and expression, and with few word recognition errors. When the goals of page speed and word recognition accuracy are reached, the student repeats the process with a new selection (1991, pp. 17-19).

Our second question asked, **In your view, what is the greatest need or question for the future in the field of reading?** In responding, Johnson expressed his

concern over the changes that have been taking place in our society for at least ten years and their impact on our educational system. We have heard him voice these concerns in the past, although those who are quick to offer criticisms of education in the United States seem to ignore his plea. Johnson noted that the demographics of American society have changed dramatically in the past decade, creating instructional challenges American teachers have never had to face before. He offered some examples:

- Twenty-five percent of children entering public schools each year live in poverty.
- One out of three children live in households where the parent or parents did not graduate from high school.
- Thirty million adult Americans cannot read well enough to read their children a bedtime story.
- One out of five children born in America is born to a teenage mother. (Every day, forty teenagers give birth to their *third* child.)
- Sixteen million children live with one parent.
- Two million children live with neither parent.
- Nearly a million American *children* are homeless.
- Although two out of three poor children are White, ninety percent of the increase in children born into poverty is from households headed by a female Black or Hispanic.
- Seven hundred thousand babies of the 3.3 million births each year (one in five), for reasons of drug use by the mother, prematurity, or nutrition are almost assured of being educationally retarded or difficult to teach.

It is apparent that Johnson believes that these changing demographics will have a critical impact on reading instruction, as well as on education as a whole and that it will be essential to address the issues raised by these societal changes.

In responding to the same question Samuels stated that regarding the future, the most critical need is for careful evaluation of whole language, especially with regard to the needs of slow learners and others who are learning-disabled. He went on to say that it is time that we get beyond the 'hype' of whole language and we see if the belief system called 'whole language' is as good as it claims to be.

Predictably, both Johnson and Samuels see the field's important developments as those relating to their particular areas of research interest. Samuels is well known for his work on the development of automaticity, and Johnson, although perhaps most widely recognized for his work in vocabulary, has also concerned himself with comprehension in general and the advances in our understanding of cognition as they have related to reading. Less predictable, but thought-provoking, are their timely concerns for the future. Samuels' concern for the perhaps premature acceptance of whole language is certainly a matter to which researchers and educators must give grave consideration. Johnson, looking at the demographic trends, sounds the alarm that the educational establishment may not be ready for the school population of the near future.

Would we all agree with their identification of the most important developments in the field of reading over the last few decades? Do we see the same needs or questions for the future as they have expressed? We welcome responses from our readers which might constitute a column in the next edition of the SoMIRAC Journal.

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LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

Report Cards in Literacy Evaluation: Teachers' Training, Practices, and Values

Peter Afflerbach
University of Maryland

Rebecca Bell Sammons
University of Maryland

The report card plays a regular and prominent role in communicating students' literacy development (Afflerbach & Johnston, in press; Freeman & Hatch, 1989). Despite their importance to teachers, students, and parents, relatively little is known about report cards, including teachers' training to write report cards, teachers' practices in developing and writing report cards, and teachers' values related to the purposes and usefulness of report cards.

Recent studies indicate that teachers rarely receive adequate training in classroom assessment, and that there is a mismatch between what classroom teachers feel is important for classroom assessment, and what is taught in teacher preparation courses (Gullickson, 1986; Linn, 1990). For example, many teachers receive instruction on how to construct multiple choice tests, but few receive instruction on how to gather, use, and report classroom observational data. A result is that teachers with the prerogative to collect and use different types of assessment information in the report card may not be prepared to do so.

A study in British schools found that teachers play minor roles in developing report cards, with school administrators often controlling the development process (Goacher & Reid, 1983). In the United States, teachers also may be outsiders to the process of developing the report cards that they are required to use (Johnston, Afflerbach, & Weiss, 1990). A result is that report cards reflect the developer's assumptions of what literacy is, and how student achievement in literacy is best measured. Many report cards reflect a view of reading as an ability that can be broken into strands of performance which typically include vocabulary, decoding, and comprehension. An accompanying assumption is that students' achievement within these strands can be adequately represented by a single letter grade (Freeman & Hatch, 1989). This view may or may not be shared by the teacher (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990).

In practice, many teachers are required to use a report card which they had no

hand in developing, to write to different audiences, and for different purposes. A result is that teachers often encounter conflicts when writing report cards. Afflerbach and Johnston (in press) found that teachers faced conflicts in writing report cards when there was a mismatch between teachers' knowlege of students' literacy development, and the means of presenting that knowledge in report cards. Conflicts may also occur when there is a mismatch between students' literacy development and achievement, and the information required by a particular report card format.

In summary, a small body of research suggests that there are many potential influences on the effectiveness of report cards to communicate teachers' knowledge of students' literacy development. These influences include the amount and type of training teachers receive (if any) to be effective writers of report cards, the degree to which teachers are involved in developing the report cards they are required to use, the different audiences and purposes of the report card, and the teachers' values related to literacy instruction and assessment. The study we report here focused on teachers' training, practices, and values for using the report card to communicate their knowledge of students' literacy achievement.

METHOD

Participants

Forty-eight teachers from 10 school districts agreed to participate in the study, including 34 elementary, 5 middle, 5 secondary school, and 4 college preparatory teachers. The teachers worked in schools in Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, and Wisconsin.

Materials

A questionnaire designed to elicit teachers' perspectives on the report cards they used for literacy assessment was developed for this study. Guided by our research interests, the questionnaire focused on teachers' professional training to develop and write report cards, teachers' actual practices in developing and writing report cards, and teachers' values related to report cards. The questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

Procedure

We sought contact people (building principals and teachers) to distribute the questionnaires to teachers who agreed to participate in the study. We requested that the teachers complete the questionnaire at a time in the school year which coincided with the writing and sending home of report cards.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Our sample consists of teachers who agreed to participate in the study. Thus we do not consider the results of this study to be generalizable to other populations. We offer the data in an effort to describe differences and similarities among the 48 teachers (and the schools and districts they work in) who participated in the study.

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In the next section, we present frequencies of teacher responses to our questionnaire, and use examples of individual teachers' responses to illustrate what we feel are important concerns related to report cards. Our aim is to describe teachers' training, practice, and values across the sample, and within the same schools and districts, among teachers using the same curriculum and report card. A related purpose is to suggest areas for future research on teachers' involvement in developing and writing report cards.

RESULTS

Training

Thirty-four teachers (71%) reported that they received no training related to developing report cards, or writing report cards. The remaining fourteen teachers reported that they had three general types of training: college courses, inservice programs, and learning from colleagues. The anonymous nature of our survey did not allow for returning to the teacher sample for clarification, but none of the teachers' accounts of training described an in-depth effort which focused on developing or writing report cards. Rather, the nature of training to write report cards (when it was reported) seemed cursory. For example, two teachers in Maryland reported on their training to write report cards. One reported that: "I had a brief inservice when I was hired. This was a 1 ½ hour lecture." (Teacher 1) Another teacher reported: "We have had some training, but not enough to make sure each of us are forming the same level(s) of opinion." (Teacher 2)

Some teachers reported receiving help from colleagues, although when this was reported it seemed more serendipitous than planned. One teacher in Maryland reported: "I have received fabulous phrases that key in on specific skills and behaviors from a many–yeared veteran that helps me immensely." (Teacher 3) Another teacher reported: "I am very fortunate to be working with a very sharing staff. We help each other through effective comment writing." (Teacher 4)

In addition to teachers' training for writing report cards, we were interested in the report card as a topic of study or discussion in teacher preparation courses. Teachers reported that this was uncommon. Only nine teachers (19%) indicated that report cards were even mentioned either in their reading methods or in their educational measurement classes. For example, a teacher from Wisconsin reported: "I have not received training specifically for writing report cards. I have had an evaluation class. This was directed mainly towards tests. The main discussion of report cards was whether or not to use letter grades." (Teacher 5) Taken together, teachers' responses indicate that the development of report cards and the writing of report cards are not regularly included in their teacher preparation courses, or professional education courses.

Practices

Developing the Report Card. Few of the participating teachers (6%) responded that they were personally involved in the development of the report card. Thus, 94%

of our participating teachers used report cards that they had no part in creating. One of our survey questions anticipated low teacher participation in developing the report card and asked teachers to identify those who were involved in developing the report card. The second question asked how long the current report card had been used. When asked who had developed the report card, teachers reported that this work was done by committees which included other teachers and administrators (38%), or exclusively by teachers (6%), or administrators (6%). Twenty-four teachers (50%) did not know who had developed the report card.

We were also interested in determining the age of the report cards in the participating districts, and teachers reported a wide range in the age of the reading/literacy report cards they used. Sixteen teachers (33%) indicated that their report cards had been revised in the last three years. Twenty-two teachers (46%) reported that they did not know how old their report cards were. Seven teachers used report cards over 6 years old (15%). The oldest report card was 18 years old, while several teachers in several districts reported that the report card was revised or developed in the past year.

Writing the Report Card. The teachers described several diverse purposes for their writing of report cards. The most frequent purpose was to communicate students' progress, reported by 85% of our teachers. Other purposes included keeping track of student progress, providing an outline for parent teacher meetings and conversations, listing suggestions for enhancing literacy learning at home, and evaluating students' progress in relation to peers. The variation and frequency of teachers' reported purposes for writing report cards are included in Table One.

Table 1 Teachers' Reported Purposes for Writing Report Cards

Purpose	Frequency of Report	(%)
Communicate students' progress	41	(85%)
Keep track of students' progress	7	(15%)
Evaluate progress in relation to students' peers	3	(6%)
Provide an outline for meetings/conversations with parents	2	(4%)
Motivate students	2	(4%)
List suggestions for literacy learning at home	1	(2%)
Accountability	1	(2%)

Note. Many teachers reported writing report cards for more than one purpose. As a result, the frequency of report does not total 48, and the percentages do not sum to 100%.

The teachers reported writing report cards for a variety of audiences, including parents, guardians, siblings, relatives, students, administrators, other teachers, and school psychologists. The most frequent perceived audience was parents and guard-

ians: 44 teachers (92%) wrote to this audience. The audiences which teachers reported writing to, and the frequency of writing to these audiences are included in Table Two.

Table 2 Audiences for Whom Teachers Reported Writing Report Cards

Audience	Frequency of Report	(%)
Parents/Guardians	44	(92%)
Students	25	(52%)
Other teachers	18	(38%)
Administrators	13	(27%)
Counselors/School psychologists	6	(13%)
Other family members	2	(4%)
Future schools	2	(4%)
ARD meetings/EMT committees	2	(4%)
Cumulative folder	1	(2%)

Note. Many teachers reported writing report cards for more than one audience. As a result, the frequency of report does not total 48, and the percentages do not sum to 100%.

We also asked teachers if they encountered difficulties when writing report cards, and a majority of teachers (68%) responded that they did have difficulties. Many difficulties revolved around the format of the report card and its ability to accommodate teachers' knowledge of students' development and progress. Some involved problems with the nature of the communication (e.g., writing report cards forced teachers to make judgments about students and to make public the judgments). Other difficulties with writing report cards ranged from a perceived insensitivity of the report card for accurate description of students' literacy achievement, to the time-consuming nature of writing a class set of detailed report cards, to an emphasis on communicating students' weaknesses without providing adequate space for reporting students' strengths and accomplishments.

Values. Asking teachers to describe the difficulties they had with report cards provided one perspective on teachers' values. To further examine these values, we asked our participating teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses of the report cards they used. In different school districts with different report cards, teachers reported strengths which included the report cards' ability to help teachers describe all students as achieving satisfactory or better reading levels, a teacher comments section which allowed for elaboration on a single-letter grading system (e.g., A-B-C-D-F), and report card formats which encouraged a focus on the literacy development of the individual child.

Reported weaknesses of report cards included arbitrary cutoffs for grades, because the difference between a report of "little progress" and "satisfactory progress" for a student could be quite small. Other reported weaknesses included the requirement of using a single letter grade and a small section for teachers' comments

to describe students' achievement, the lack of space for comprehensive teacher comments, the lack of opportunity to describe integration of reading abilities into content areas, and the fact that report cards might hinder the individual relationship between teacher and student, rather than enhance it.

Teachers in the same school or district, using the same curriculum and report cards, described a wide array of values when discussing the relative strengths and weaknesses of their report cards. The following comments are from teachers within the same school or district. The excerpts highlight the relative value of the report card from the individual teachers' perspectives, and the idiosyncratic nature of the values held by teachers for writing report cards.

Two teachers in the same middle school in Wisconsin made these comments related to the length and specificity of the report card:

> "More details could be added." (Teacher 6)
> "It is pretty long and detailed." (Teacher 7)

Describing how the report card accommodated their knowledge of students' literacy development, two teachers from the same New York City high school reported:

> "Not too well." (Teacher 8)
> "Excellently." (Teacher 9)

Several teachers reported that their schools used computer software programs which offered an array of comments for teachers to choose for inclusion on the report card. Two high school teachers in New York reported:

> "We are limited to comments chosen from a menu. Very often the student doesn't 'fit' the menu." (Teacher 10)
> "The computerized report card has individual comments which help explain the grade." (Teacher 11)

The preceding examples illustrate the variation in teachers' values on particular aspects of report cards within the same schools. They also help anticipate the challenges to creating report cards which meet the concerns, and embody the values of every teacher.

DISCUSSION

The teachers participating in this study reported a wide variety of training, practices, and values related to developing and writing report cards. Few teachers reported receiving any training to write report cards, either in college courses, or as part of inservice work. It appears that report card writing may not be considered an important assessment ability, or that teachers' ability to write effective report cards is assumed. If this is the case, we suggest that these assumptions be carefully examined. Courses in educational measurement and reading assessment often neglect issues related to communicating assessment information. Without proper training to design and write report cards, teachers who would like to be involved in the development of useful report cards may not be. When asked to communicate their knowledge of students' literacy development, teachers may not achieve effective communication through the report card.

The majority of teachers participating in this investigation reported that they did not receive any training to write report cards, and that they were not involved in the

development of the report cards which they were required to use. At first glance, this may seem logical: Without specific training related to developing and using the report card for communicating reading assessment, teachers may not be prepared to take on this task. Yet it is teachers who must use the report card, and the report card is most often perceived as the voice of the teacher. It is time to consider the consequences of teachers using report cards which may not reflect their values, or input. In addition, it is important to consider the peculiar situation some teachers may find themselves in: being asked to participate in designing or revising report cards, but not being fully prepared to do so. Given the reported difficulties that teachers have writing report cards, greater inclusion of teachers in the process of developing report cards may alleviate some of the difficulties. And if teachers are included to a greater degree, then appropriate training in writing report cards is needed.

In practice, the participating teachers reported writing report cards for a wide variety of purposes and audiences. Difficulties occurred when the format of the report card did not help teachers write for their specific purposes and to the desired audiences. The reported difficulties suggest that flexible report card formats may help teachers be most effective in communicating through the report card. For example, if a teacher is writing a report card that will be read by parents, the student, and an administrator, a format which allows the inclusion of information that is useful to all is necessary.

Our participating teachers clearly differed in the degree to which they valued the report cards they used, and what they considered strengths and weaknesses. In general, if the report card helped teachers achieve effective communication, the report card was valued. Some teachers valued report cards for the specificity they provided for describing students' literacy development. In these instances, the more the report card accommodated teachers' knowledge, the more it was valued. In contrast, teachers did not value the report card when it was not helpful in communicating teachers' knowledge. In general, if the report card did not contain enough specific information, or did not help the teacher clearly demonstrate knowledge of a particular student, the report card was not valued. Some teachers felt that report cards were overly long, and that the task of writing lengthy narratives for each student was unrealistic, given the constraints on the teachers' time, and lack of teachers' training. Again, the idiosyncratic differences in perceived strengths and weaknesses of the report card were striking: One teacher considered a four page narrative for one student a burden, and another considered it a key to effective communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results suggest that it may be difficult or impossible to build the ideal report card, within or across schools and districts. This is not surprising, given the different values, practices, and abilities which teachers bring to this important aspect of literacy assessment. An attainable goal may be that the report card reflects a wide range of participation, and a wide range of values, while retaining the ability to communicate effectively students' reading development.

Within our sample of teachers, there were several commonalities. First, the majority of teachers used the literacy report card to communicate student progress to parents and students. A majority of teachers was also concerned that the report card be capable of helping them describe student development accurately and be sensitive to individual achievements and development. In addition, most teachers were concerned that the report card meet these criteria without becoming an overwhelming task, in terms of the time required to write report cards. These commonalities suggest possible components of effective report cards, and may provide general goals for developing new report cards, or revising existing report cards.

All the teachers participating in this study used report cards, while almost none of the teachers was involved in developing report cards. We feel it is time to consider the consequences of such practice. Increased participation in the development of report cards will bring both challenges and benefits. Challenges will include the balancing of values and beliefs of many members of the educational community, while creating report cards that serve the purpose of effectively communicating students' literacy achievement. If the report card is developed by diverse members of educational communities, the purpose, format, and message of the report card will be better understood by those who write and read them. A resulting benefit may be report cards which best reflect the values of teachers, best communicate student accomplishments, and provide useful information to the readers of report cards.

Finally, the different values, perceptions, and practices which teachers reported suggest that developing the report card is often an exclusionary process. The concerns, difficulties, and conflicts which these teachers had with report cards suggest that the development and use of report cards might be enhanced by a system which encourages participation from more teachers. Further, a system which seeks to include interested teachers might also invite increased participation from parents and students who read report cards.

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Note: We would like to thank the teachers and principals who so willingly participated in this study.

Appendix A

Questionnaire Used in the Study

What do you feel is the purpose of the literacy report cards you write?

Who is the primary audience for the literacy report cards you write? Are there any other audiences?

What are the strengths of your report card, in terms of helping you communicate students' literacy achievement?

What are the weaknesses of your report card?

How well does the report card accommodate your knowledge of students' literacy development?

Do you have difficulties when you write report cards? If so, could you describe them?

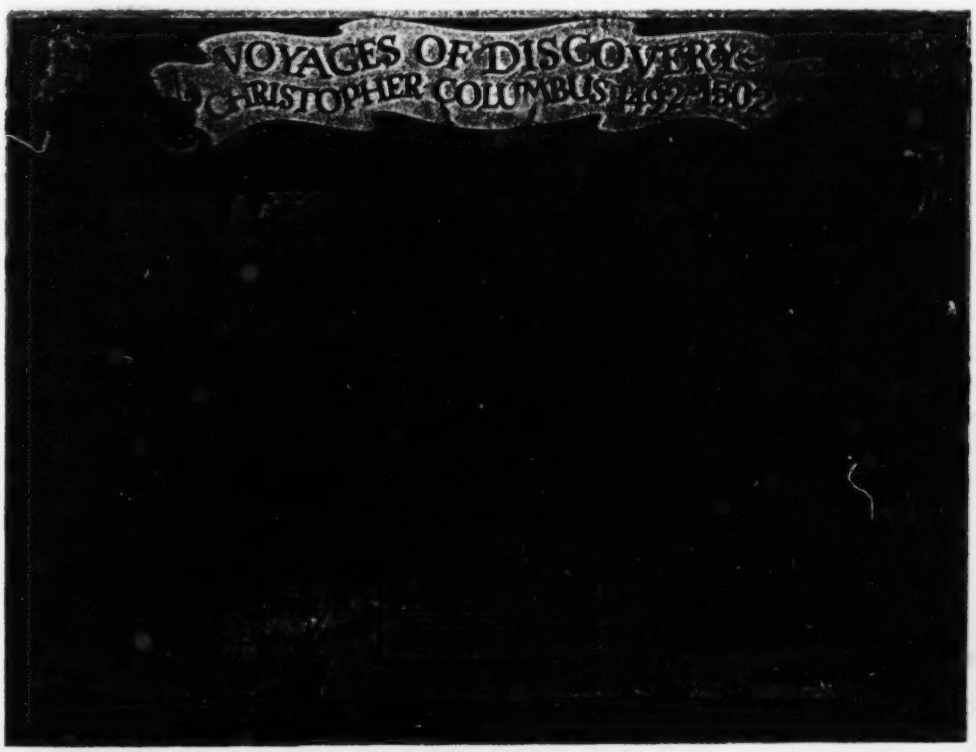
Have you ever received training to write report cards? Please describe.

Were report cards ever a topic of study or discussion in any of your teacher preparation courses? If yes, which one(s)?

Were you involved in the development of the report card used in your school?

Who is involved in the development of the report card?

When was the report card which you use last revised, or created?



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LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

Building Credibility for Portfolio Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years we have come to view reading as an interactive process in which the reader responds to text. Our assessment procedures, however, have not undergone a comparable transformation. Norm-referenced tests do have a place in the instructional evaluation process and can serve an important function of evaluating the effectiveness of programs, perhaps even providing some limited insight regarding an individual student's performance as compared with others of the same reference group. Nevertheless the data obtained from these instruments are often much too delayed and unrelated to our view of the reading process to be of any substantial help in the day–to–day instructional decisions of classroom teachers.

Peter Johnston (1987) stated, "The most fundamental goal of all educational evaluation is optimal instruction for all children and evaluation practices are only legitimate to the extent that they serve this goal" (1987, p. 744). Johnston further asserts, "The bulk of instructional decision making takes place in the classroom on a moment to moment basis" (1987, p. 744). Anyone who has spent even a few days in a classroom can attest to the absolute truth of this last statement. Therefore, it is critical that classroom teachers become proficient in ongoing evaluation of student progress and that they develop keen observational skills that result in accurate, immediate feedback on which to base these instructional decisions.

Further support for this view comes from Pikulski (1989) who states "The assessment of reading must shift from being test-centered to being teacher and pupil centered" and that the "form of reading assessment must reflect the goals of instruction and the dynamic, constructionist nature of the reading process" (p. 80). The development of a portfolio approach to the assessment of reading and literacy may offer the best possible chance to make the shift to teacher– and pupil–centered evaluation.

According to Valencia (1990), "Portfolios represent a philosophy that demands that we view assessment as an integral part of our instruction, providing a process for teachers and students to guide learning" (p. 340). It is a philosophy that "honors both the process and the products of learning as well as the active participation of the teacher and the students in their own evaluation and growth" (p. 340). In supporting the portfolio assessment approach, Valencia (p. 338) describes four characteristics of sound assessment:

1. Sound assessment is anchored in authenticity. Tasks, texts, and contexts all must be authentic.
2. Sound assessment must be continuous. In this way it chronicles development.
3. Sound assessment is multidimensional sampling a wide range of cognitive processes, affective responses, and literacy activities.
4. Finally, sound assessment must provide for active, collaborative reflection by both teacher and student.

Authenticity is a key feature of portfolio assessment and performance assessment instruments currently being designed and implemented in statewide evaluations such as the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. Wiggins (1989) describes authentic tests as having four basic characteristics in common.

> "First, they are designed to be truly representative of performance in the field; only then are the problems of scoring reliability and logistics of testing considered. Second, far greater attention is paid to the teaching and learning of the criteria to be used in the assessment. Third, self-assessment plays a much greater role than in conventional testing. And, fourth, the students are often expected to present their work and defend themselves publicly and orally to ensure that their apparent mastery is genuine." (p. 45)

Portfolio assessment incorporates all of these components. Hence, it meets the criteria of authenticity.

Tierney, Carter & Desai (1991) support the use of portfolios in the classroom but prefer that portfolios not be scored or graded. Rather, their recommendation is that students' efforts be evaluated through descriptions that illustrate the individual student's strengths and needs. These writers do, however, recognize the societal demands for scores and grades and suggest that if portfolios must be graded, narrative comments and multiple grades differentiating a variety of aspects of student achievement, effort and goals be used.

Realizing the tremendous potential of the portfolio approach has to bring good instruction and assessment together, teachers at Lettie Marshall Dent Elementary School in Mechanicsville, Maryland initiated a pilot portfolio assessment project. The following is a description of one school's efforts to implement a portfolio assessment approach in the area of language arts in three third grade classrooms.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

A pilot study of portfolio assessment was conducted by three third grade teachers over a five month period with the assistance of Dr. Gene Jongsma, The Psychological Corporation, and Dr. Roger Farr, Indiana University. This was an independent school–designed pilot using commercially designed portfolio materials as a common framework. Teachers did background reading about the use of portfolios in classrooms and portfolio assessment. The *Integrated Assessment System, Language Arts Performance Assessment and Language Arts Portfolio* developed by The Psychological Corporation (1990) was used by each teacher. The package contained a resource manual with background information on portfolio assessment, sample procedures and forms for setting up student portfolios and a bibliography of additional reference materials related to language arts instruction and assessment. The

Psychological Corporation provided scoring assistance for the three reading/writing/language prompts that were administered as part of the portfolio package. Dr. Farr met with the teachers as the project began and provided ongoing assistance throughout the project.

Since teachers varied greatly in their knowledge and experience with the portfolio approach, the use of a specific, commercial portfolio provided a common basis from which to begin our study of portfolios. As teachers became familiar with the materials and began to implement the different components, they quickly saw the need for modifications and made them as a team. Teacher judgment was critical in the effective use of this instructional tool.

Procedures

At the school level, an initial meeting was held to discuss guidelines for the project and to clarify responsibilities. At this meeting teachers agreed to develop two lists of items to be included in each student's portfolio. One list included required items that all teachers would include. The other listed optional items that teachers could select. This way, it would be possible to make some comparisons across classrooms. Required items were:

Tape recorded samples of oral reading taken at different times throughout the portfolio project

Informal Reading Inventory

Reading Logs containing the titles and authors of books read, student comments about their reading, and teacher comments and conferencing notes

Writing Logs containing titles of writings, student comments about their writings and teacher comments and conferencing notes

Student Reading/Writing Interviews in which students described themselves as readers and writers, identified models of good reading and writing, discussed strategies they used and responded to questions about their interests in the areas of reading and writing

Writing Samples of various types of writing

Written Responses to Selected Literature

Optional items that could be selected by individual teachers included:

Monthly Oral Reading Inventories

Class and Individual Projects and Activities that students contracted for units of study completed about different books

In our initial discussion, teachers agreed that in order for portfolios to be given at least as much credibility as some of the other measures used to assess student performance, there was a need to establish interrater reliability among teachers. Previously, concerns have been expressed about the unreliability, inconsistency, and inequity across classrooms, school, and districts when portfolio assessment is implemented. However, Valencia (1990), describes several mechanisms that may protect against this criticism. "First, by engaging in discussions about the goals and priorities for instruction and assessment, we can build a common understanding of expectations and criteria" (p. 339). Even using a commercially prepared portfolio system with scoring rubrics and guidelines, it was important for teachers to come to agreement about their expectations of student performance. For example, regarding

the amount of reading and writing, teachers with more experience and experience at different grade levels were better able to judge what could reasonably be expected from a third grade student who was making satisfactory progress. This information provided a reference for the assessment of the individual progress of each student. Valencia (1990) has also suggested that "by assessing in an ongoing way, we collect several indicators for any particular goal; generally the more measures one has, the greater the reliability of the conclusions or decisions one makes" (p. 339). We decided to follow the guidelines in the portfolio materials. At the end of the project each teacher evaluated students' portfolios based on the holistic scoring rubrics provided in the areas of reading and writing. Specifically, portfolios received scores in both reading and writing with regard to (1) amount of reading/writing; (2) attitudes toward reading/writing; and (3) progress in using reading/writing strategies for a total of six scores. Consistent with some of the recommendations made by Tierney, et al. (1991), student portfolios received multiple grades differentiating a variety of aspects of student achievement, effort, and goals.

The **amount** of reading and writing of the individual student was compared to the amount done in the previous period, teacher expectations of the student's performance, and how the student compared with other students regarding amount. Amount was described as *extensive*, *moderate*, or *limited*. Student **attitudes toward and interests in reading and writing** were assessed by the topics and the genres selected by the student and whether the student's attitude towards reading and writing could best be described as *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative*. Student **progress in using reading/writing strategies** was assessed by teacher observations on specific strategies such as: focusing on a purpose when reading and an audience when writing, using background knowledge, having a sense of story structure, making predictions, visualizing, summarizing, revising and rereading, and using external resources to aid in reading as well as in writing. Progress was rated as *extensive*, *moderate*, or *limited*.

After each teacher scored the portfolios of her own students, she randomly selected 10 of these to be scored blindly by the other two teachers in the pilot project. By comparing the scores of all three teachers on the 30 selected portfolios, we determined teacher agreement on the scoring and identified the dimension (amount, attitudes, or development) on which agreement was highest. One portfolio was unscorable and had to be eliminated from the sample leaving the actual number of cases scored at 29.

Portfolio Scoring Generalizations

Table 1 summarizes the percentages of teacher agreement reached on the three dimensions of reading on which the portfolios were scored.

The dimension on which we found the highest degree of teacher agreement in the area of reading was that of development. In reviewing the actual scores given by each teacher on each of the dimensions, we learned that the highest teacher agreement overall was when a cell within a dimension received a rating of one. Scores ranged from one to three with one representing the highest score. When assessing portfolios for reading, teachers were in agreement in 21 of the 32 cells where a

student received a score of 1 regardless of the dimension assessed. Clearly, teachers identified top performances with a high level of consistency.

Table 1 Teacher Ratings—Percentages of Agreement in Reading

	3 of 3 Teachers Agreed	2 of 3 Teachers Agreed
AMOUNT	33% of the portfolios	89% of the portfolios
ATTITUDES	38% of the portfolios	97% of the portfolios
DEVELOPMENT	41% of the portfolios	100% of the portfolios

N = 29 portfolios

The same evaluation was conducted in the area of writing. Again we looked at the same three dimensions: amount, attitudes, and development. Table 2 summarizes the percentages of agreement of the teachers when they rated portfolios for writing.

Table 2 Teacher Ratings—Percentages of Agreement in Writing

	3 of 3 Teachers Agreed	2 of 3 Teachers Agreed
AMOUNT	45% of the portfolios	97% of the portfolios
ATTITUDES	45% of the portfolios	90% of the portfolios
DEVELOPMENT	34% of the portfolios	97% of the portfolios

N = 29 portfolios

In the area of writing, unlike reading, high performers were not as clearly identified. Teachers were able to identify poor, average, and high performances with approximately the same consistency.

We also looked at the agreement with which teachers rated portfolios by class. The three teachers in the study represented a variety of teaching experience levels. Teacher A had taught for 17 years and had done extensive background reading on portfolio approaches. Teacher B has taught for 3 years and at the time of the pilot project was approximately halfway through her master's program in reading. Teacher C was in her first year of teaching.

Table 3 Percentages of Agreement by Class/Teacher

Teacher:	
A	On 43% of Teacher A's student portfolios, all three teachers were in agreement.
B	On 55% of Teachers B's student portfolios, all three teachers were in agreement.
C	On 15% of Teacher C's student portfolios, all three teachers were in agreement.

All teachers followed the same procedures, used the same resource manual, and included the same required items; however, differences in organizational style, background experience, and implementation appear to have affected the ease and consistency with which individual portfolios were scored.

Teachers were also asked for their comments on the strengths of implementing a portfolio assessment as well as their ideas for modifications and areas of concern. One teacher commented, "I feel one of the greatest advantages of portfolios is that the students are able to take a look at their work over a long period of time and reflect on their progress. I really feel this reflection builds self esteem and confidence in students as writers. . . . Portfolios are also helpful in parent conferences as they are a reflection of what is going on in the classroom." Another teacher saw individuality and students' ability to "capitalize on strengths while getting suggestions for areas of improvement" as advantages of the portfolio approach.

Regarding the ease and consistency of portfolio assessment, one teacher stated, "If you want a consistent means of evaluating, then you need to have a list of items that should be included in all folders by classroom or grade levels." Another teacher added, "I feel that teachers have different expectations and it is difficult to evaluate portfolios from another teacher's class. I think that training in the area of portfolio evaluation will be necessary in the future. If portfolios are passed on from year to year, consistency in this area will be necessary."

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our effort to implement a portfolio assessment approach in three third grade classrooms was successful in many ways. It served as a valuable learning experience that will lead to improved instruction and assessment in our school. Working through a commercially prepared portfolio system provided an inservice for the teachers who participated in the project. It helped teachers build a common base of knowledge about the philosophy behind portfolio assessment as well as a working knowledge of the major components that need to be considered when developing a schoolwide portfolio program. The greatest challenge appears to be developing a portfolio system that will allow for the flexibility and individuality necessary to meet the needs of students at different developmental levels throughout the school, while at the same time providing continuity and consistency across classrooms and grade levels so that portfolio assessment has the credibility needed in a viable assessment program. Hence, portfolios should be used to assist teachers with instructional decisions and not just be viewed as "work folders."

Portfolio assessment does, indeed, provide a valid means of assessing progress and allows teachers to look at a variety of indicators such as amount of reading or writing the student does, student attitudes toward reading and writing, and progress in the development of strategies in each of these areas. Used together with the other types of assessment used by schools, portfolios have tremendous potential to enhance the total assessment program by providing a wealth of specific, ongoing information about a student's performance.

Some questions remain concerning the amount and nature of training that should occur in order to ensure teacher proficiency in evaluating portfolios. One of the most valuable aspects of the scoring process is the opportunity for teachers to

discuss areas of disagreement with each other and work to achieve consensus. This appears to reinforce each teacher's understanding of the scoring criteria and improves consistency of scoring individual student portfolios across teachers. In this project, teachers experienced growth in interpreting the qualitative data they received from their students, but all agreed there was a need for more training and practice in analyzing qualitative data. Additionally, it may be overwhelming for beginning teachers who have not been exposed to portfolio assessment in their methods courses to implement this type of assessment approach. Different levels of support may be needed by individual teachers depending on their experience levels and their background knowledge of the portfolio approach. Schools and districts will need to seriously review this concern before any consideration of schoolwide or district wide implementation takes place.

Student conferencing was also mentioned by teachers as being valuable but quite time consuming. We will need to develop better methods of conducting student conferences and maintaining notes on these conferences to make portfolio assessment more feasible. The student conference is a critical feature of the portfolio approach, and as stated by Valencia and Pearson (1987), "Some things you can learn only by talking to a student one on one" (p. 726).

The author wishes to thank Dr. Gene Jongsma and Dr. Roger Farr for their assistance with this project.

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LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

Large Scale Assessment in Maryland: Comments from a Panel of Leading MSPAP Developers, Hannah Kruglanski, Barbara Kapinus and Trudy Collier

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The Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) is part of the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP) which addresses performance based assessment of students in grades 3, 5, and 8. In 1990-91, students were assessed in mathematics, reading, writing, and language usage. This year for the first time, students take additional assessments in science and social studies. Integral to these assessments are reading and writing processes.

In the forefront of developing these assessments are **Hannah Kruglanski, Barbara Kapinus,** and **Trudy Collier.** Hannah is the Assessment Task Coordinator. Her area of expertise is test development and evaluation with authentic assessment measures. In Connecticut and Maryland she initiated the task of operationalizing performance assessment. The project was a blending of content and process with careful attention to underlying constructs in each academic discipline. Barbara Kapinus is a Specialist in Reading and Communication Skills for the Maryland State Department. Barb also served as Project Coordinator for the 1992 NAEP Reading Consensus Development Project. Trudy Collier is the Chief of Language Development and an English/Language Arts Specialist with the Maryland State Department of Education. Trudy formerly was with the Baltimore City Schools as an instructional specialist in English. All three are leading educators who have participated in coordinating the development of MSPP.

The panelists were asked to comment on the nature and development of the performance assessments and to address concerns expressed by teachers in the state. Panelists' responses led to an interesting discussion of the model Maryland has used and its impact on instruction now and for the future.

HOW HAS THIS PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT BEEN DEVELOPED AND WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO THE WAY IT HAS PROCEEDED?

Barb—It has been a collaborative effort on the part of the state and county school systems. I am extremely pleased with the way development has gone. It goes beyond my envisionment.

Trudy—We've built a model for instruction throughout the state in having teachers work together on assessment in all aspects of reading/language arts. An integrated model has resulted in teachers conversant in both reading and writing process. The model supports the whole language philosophy and practice.

Hannah—I am pleased with the direction of the assessment development. There has been strong commitment and leadership in implementing the latest trends in the discipline. We operationalized the concept of performance assessment by providing multiple opportunities for students to interact with authentic unabridged text and multiple opportunities for them to be strategic. We have allowed students to produce written protocols of their experiences and to interact with peers during the assessment.

The construct of reading has been defined with Barb's leadership in making the Langer model of reading perspectives work.

Barb—Langer's work has clarified the kinds of perspectives readers take when constructing meaning. The tasks on the assessments are based on the four types of orientations that readers have as they construct meaning. The first perspective involves the global stance when readers generate an overall envisionment of the text. The second one involves developing an interpretation of the text. The third stance requires a reader to construct a personal response, and finally, the fourth orientation calls for the reader to take a critical stance in looking at the text from the author's craft.

The goal has been for teacher inclusion in development. That provides for grass roots ownership. It has also afforded a chance to promote staff development as well as a test development within the same process. Teachers learn the constructs of the disciplines and become better questioners in their own reading and writing instruction. Finally, teachers have been the reality check for us.

Hannah—Performance assessment reflects thinking performance. Reading-writing assessment tasks simulate how effective readers process information and construct meaning when engaging with texts. The tasks allow students to reflect on the process. There is strong alignment between the assessment and instruction where thinking process is concerned.

Trudy—Inclusion of teachers in development also responds to the concern people express about tests that have nothing in common with instruction. Teachers can use this test as a model for instruction because the activities reflect sound language arts philosophy and make sense.

Barb—It's also an effort to make large scale assessment congruent with instruction. David Pearson and Sheila Valencia have been critical of tests that are not related to curricular goals. Teachers can no longer criticize this type of assessment where instructional goals, theory, and assessment are aligned.

Hannah—Teachers at first resisted the Langer model but at this point instruction and assessment converged.

Barb—When we put Langer's stances along with other taxonomies for presentations on the table for state leaders in reading to consider, there was a positive response to Langer's stances because of the immediate link of reading to all levels of understanding.

Trudy—It is important to remember that the state assessment only shows a small portion of what students can do. It is not an end in and of itself. The state assessment

offers a core to which local systems, schools, and classroom teachers can add data which meaningfully evaluates their program.

Barb—Yes, the purpose is to look at school performance, not at individual students. Maryland State Department is giving opportunities for children to be what they can be. It is within the teacher's realm to determine progress. The assessment acknowledges the role of the teacher in individual assessment. MSPAP does not provide comparative data or diagnostic data for individual students.

Trudy—MSPAP is only a part of the total Maryland State English/Language Arts component. It is not part of a larger assessment system.

Hannah—Portfolios and performance assessments are both authentic assessment instruments used for different purposes. Performance assessment provides data at a point in time, whereas portfolios are used to collect data over time.

TEACHERS ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE ACCOUNTABILITY ASPECT OF ASSESSMENT. HOW DO YOU ADDRESS THIS CONCERN?

Trudy—The assessment empowers teachers in extending the curriculum with strategies and activities. It allows teachers to be researchers in watching kids grow. Teachers are encouraged to adapt their instruction in light of what they learn through this type of qualitative research.

Hannah—The assessment is intended to provide information for the purpose of program improvement. The model we used reflects and honors what effective teachers were doing all along; that is, moving away from discrete skill and behavioristic approaches to teaching reading and writing in a more cognitive and holistic model.

Barb—It impacts on instruction in a positive way. What makes a good answer is thought of in a broad sense, not formulaic. Discussion encourages students to take stances. Response logs can be coded for stances. Thus, the teacher sees discussion and response logs as tools for instruction that are supported by the assessment.

Empower is not an intransitive verb. However, we cannot empower teachers. They empower themselves. We can only give them situations in which they can exercise their choices and expertise. This assessment opens doors for teachers. It gives them the option of taking up a challenge. Teachers can decide to use this assessment to evoke the best from students or they can choose to resist it. The teachers I've met, the most visionary, are taking up this challenge to use the assessment as a support for their own growth and that of their students.

LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

A Comparison of Teacher Read Aloud Practices and Attitudes: 1980-1990

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When teachers read aloud from children's literature, they introduce students to good literature and encourage the development of vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills. The reading aloud of children's literature by classroom teachers, according to Dwyer and Isbell (1989), is one of the three essential ingredients in a total reading program that consists of (a) teacher-directed reading instruction, (b) recreational reading (sustained silent reading), and (c) teacher read aloud.

Studies conducted during the 1970's documented that reading aloud to students improves vocabulary and comprehension skills (Cosgrove, 1989; Elley, 1989; Sticht, Beck, Lawrence, Hauke, Kleiman, & James, 1974; Strickland, 1971; Taylor, 1976; Weidner, 1976). In addition, several studies have indicated that reading aloud also improves students' writing skills (DeVries, 1970; Michener, 1985; Stotsky, 1983).

Because teachers play such an important role in the development of children's reading habits, teacher read aloud practices and attitudes are of primary concern. Teachers are very important models and have a tremendous impact on their students. Reading good literature aloud is perhaps the major way in which teachers share their enthusiasm for reading with their students. However, reading aloud to students does more than simply attract willing readers. According to Cullinan (1987), sharing literature with students "educates the imagination, provides language models, and molds the intellect (p. 6)."

With the advent of the whole language movement during the last decade, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the importance of using children's literature in the instructional reading program. Also, during the last decade journals in the field of reading have published increasing numbers of articles on whole language and literature-based reading instruction. Our impression was that classrooms in Maryland have indeed changed over the few years with respect to the emphasis on the use of literature in the reading program. Therefore, we undertook this study to compare present teacher read aloud practices in 1990 with those of 1980.

Over a decade ago Gambrell (1980) conducted a survey study designed to ascertain teacher practices and attitudes toward children's literature and reading aloud

to children in the classroom. This study provides us with an anchor for comparing teacher practices and attitudes of 1980 with those of teachers responding to the survey conducted in 1990.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether, from 1980 to 1990, there were significant changes in teacher practices and attitudes toward reading aloud to students. Four questions were asked in both the 1980 and 1990 studies with respect to teacher read aloud practices and attitudes:

1. How important do you feel it is for students to have story time where the teacher reads aloud from children's literature?
2. How often do you read aloud to your students?
3. Do you believe that reading children's literature aloud to students is more important for some grade levels than for others?
4. How much do you enjoy reading aloud to your students?

Participants in the study. Teachers who responded to the 1980 and 1990 surveys all volunteered to participate. In the 1980 survey, 69 teachers (K-3) from Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and the District of Columbia responded. In the 1990 survey, 52 teachers (K-3) from 9 of 14 schools in a county in Maryland responded.

Classroom reading instruction, 1980-1990. In the initial study in 1980, all teachers who responded to the survey reported using a basal program as the primary basis for reading instruction. Approximately 5% of those teachers reported that they supplemented basal instruction with children's literature or language experience stories.

In the 1990 survey, only 20% of the teachers reported that the basal was the sole basis for their reading program. Approximately 50% reported using basals supplemented by children's literature. Five percent reported using a whole language program and 10% reported using whole language supplemented by basals. Less than 1% of the respondents reported primary use of children's literature, however, 9% reported using children's literature supplemented by basals. Only 2% reported primary use of the language experience approach, while 5% reported using language experience supplemented by basals or children's literature. These data suggest that there has been a shift away from sole reliance on basal programs for reading instruction as reported in 1980.

The teachers in 1990 reported far greater use of children's literature in the reading program as compared to the 1980 survey. It should be noted that 70% still report that they use basals, however, 50% supplement the basal with children's literature. The fact that 9% of the 1990 respondents reported primary use of children's literature supplemented by the basal is noteworthy, since in 1980 none of the teachers reported primary use of children's literature in their reading programs. While most teachers still report that they use basals, it is clear that in 1990 teachers are making far greater use of children's literature in their reading programs.

Teacher practices and attitudes, 1980-1990. Table 1 below presents the results of the 1980 survey and the results of the 1990 survey.

DISCUSSION

This study of a comparison of teacher read aloud practices and attitudes reveals some interesting changes from 1980 to 1990. Of most importance in this study were

Table 1 A Comparison of Teacher Read Aloud Practices and Attitudes 1980-1990

	1980	1990
1. How important do you feel it is for students to have story time where the teacher reads aloud from children's literature?		
Very important	96%	94%
2. How often do you read aloud to your students?		
Everyday	45%	73%
3. Do you believe that reading children's literature aloud to students is more important for some grade levels than for others?		
Yes	45%	31%
4. How much do you enjoy reading aloud to your students?		
Very much	90%	99%

the findings that children's literature is a more integral part of the reading instructional program in the 90's and that teachers are reading aloud more frequently to their students.

In our 1990 survey and in the survey conducted in 1980, an average of 95% of the teachers reported that reading aloud to students was "very important." In 1980, 96% of teachers agreed; in 1991, 94% agreed. Primary grade teachers have a long history of placing a high value on children's literature and reading aloud to children. It was no surprise that in 1980 and in 1990 teachers reported a strong belief that it is important for students to have storytime where the teacher reads aloud from children's literature.

On the remaining three items in the survey there were significant differences between the reports of the teachers in 1980 and those in the 1990 survey. The teachers who participated in the 1990 survey reported a significant increase in reading aloud to students on a daily basis (73%) as compared with the 1980 teachers (45%). This increase in reading aloud to students might be a result of the whole language movement which emphasizes the importance of reading aloud and the use of children's literature in the classroom. This speculation is buttressed by the fact that the 1990 teachers reported using significantly more children's literature as a part of their instructional program as compared to the 1980 teachers. Also contributing to this increase might be the current availability of high quality children's literature in less expensive paperback editions. It appears that today's teachers are making increasingly greater use of children's literature and they are reading aloud more often on a daily basis to their students.

In 1980, forty-five percent of the teachers reported that teacher read aloud was more important for the lower primary grades than for elementary grades, as compared to only 31% in 1990. This shift in attitude is interesting in that recent research supports the contention that significant learning occurs for upper elementary students who are consistently exposed to teacher read aloud sessions (Cosgrove, 1989).

In *Becoming A Nation of Readers,* Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) recommend that reading aloud on a daily basis should continue throughout the elementary grades. The data from this study suggest that greater numbers of todays' teachers believe that reading aloud is important throughout the elementary grades.

The last question in our survey was, "How much do you enjoy reading to your students?" In 1980, ninety percent of the teachers responded that they enjoyed it "very much," while the 1990 figure was up to 99%. As teachers incorporate more children's literature in the classroom reading program and read aloud more frequently to their students, it appears that they enjoy it more! For those of us who believe that teacher read aloud is a primary vehicle for sharing the joy of reading with students, this is indeed a positive finding.

The value of teacher read aloud has been sufficiently documented in the literature during the past decade. Teacher read aloud sessions are valuable for promoting reading development and appreciation for literature. According to Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson (1985), "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for reading is reading aloud to children" (p. 23). The results of the study reported here suggest that teachers of today place a high value on reading aloud and are doing it far more often than teachers of a decade ago.

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LITERACY: ISSUES AND PRACTICES, Volume 9, 1992

Reading Instruction: The Current Myths

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What does myth have to do with reading instruction? And how can anyone be so bold as to suggest that any reading instruction is based on myth? The simple answer is that I began this article with the working title, "Reading Instruction: The Current Lies," but decided that lies are too deliberate and calculated. Rather it seems to me that much of what we do in reading instruction falls more in the realm of myth or even tall tales rather than outright lies. At the very least, this puts a more benign construction on our current instructional practices. According to *The American College Dictionary,* one of the definitions of a myth is "a collective belief that is built upon response to the wishes of the group rather than an analysis of the basis of the wishes." So, do myths really exist in reading instruction? I think they do. In fact, we are currently operating with a number of myths in reading instruction! I have selected the two myths I find most troublesome in classrooms right now.

Myth #1—I refer to this myth as **the nonreading approach to reading in the content areas.** The belief system for this myth is rooted in the laudatory notion that students ought to be actively involved in content learning. The curriculum which surrounds this myth provides students with lots of hands-on activities, but frequently no reading. A corollary to the belief in active student involvement is that current content textbooks fall short of the ideal in terms of providing content information in a form that is accessible to all students. This is a conclusion with which few would argue.

The solution for the textbook problem according to the prevailing myth is not to use any textbooks at all; rather the entire content is to be gleaned from sources other than textbooks. Educators as a group praise this type of curriculum, and several activities-based curricula with no textbook reading have recently won awards. The problem is that many years of research indicate that textbook reading is substantially different from reading basal readers or trade books. The notion that children will learn to read a textbook without ever being exposed to textbooks is a troubling one if we are to accept the accumulated research.

Recently, when I questioned one of the developers of an activities curriculum about my concern with the lack of reading in content areas, I was informed that there are trade books that children can read to supplement social studies topics. This is a praiseworthy notion in that it overcomes the problem of **no** reading at all in content classrooms. However, it does little to overcome the fact that students are not encountering expository text as it appears in textbooks.

When will students be expected to confront textbooks? I surely hope we don't wait until college to prepare students for textbook reading. As a college professor, I can attest to the fact that most of my colleagues would rather cut off significant portions of their anatomies rather than help students learn to use college texts more effectively. ("They're supposed to know that when they come to us." "It's not my job!")

Rather than throw out the textbooks, two suggestions come to mind for integrating textbook use with content activities. After all, there is nothing sacrosanct about a chapter. Teachers might choose to have students read only a section or two of a given chapter as a supplement to hands-on activities. The textbook need not be **the curriculum;** that would be foolish. However, banning reading and textbooks from the content classroom altogether would be equally foolhardy. Another option for more effective textbook use is that teachers have multiple textbooks in one classroom on a given topic. Teachers could allow students to pick the textbook which they feel most comfortable using, or teachers could assign students sections from different textbooks. Given the technological revolutions occurring right now in publishing, it may soon be possible for districts to "custom order" a textbook to meet the needs of locally determined curricula. Until then it may be possible for local needs to be heard by publishers. It is worth a try. Almost anything is better in my estimation than abandoning reading and textbooks altogether and accepting the myth of the nonreading approach to reading in the content areas.

Myth #2—The second myth for which I see clear evidence and many adherents is the **nonteaching myth of literacy development.** In the past, it has been observed that teachers are mostly "mentioners." That is, as a group we tend to mention those things which we think are important and expect students to learn the things we mention. The mentioning method of teaching has also been a myth, but I think it has been replaced by the nonteaching myth. I find this myth to be pervasive especially in classrooms where some type of whole language instruction is occurring. Previously it was thought to be important to teach children everything and to break reading down into such a vast array of subskills which needed teaching that students seldom got the chance to read. Those days are past, however, and the new notion is that if you can't or shouldn't teach everything, then you should teach nothing, and kids will learn to read as they learned to talk. In reading, the current mythology works in the following way. Teachers assume that if students simply are exposed to good literature and read often, no instruction is necessary. Students will naturally love to read and, therefore, will learn to read. My interpretation of the available body of research is that there is strong evidence for some type of a direct instruction model in reading, and there is little or no evidence that the noninstruction model of reading works for the majority of students. This argument does not imply, however, that everything about reading needs to be taught to all children. Clearly this is not true. Nor does it imply that all children need the same instruction at the same time on the same skills, for clearly this is not true either. My observation after visiting scores of classrooms is that not all readers learn everything simply by noticing how print is put together or how stories unfold. Not all readers spontaneously analyze plot or character development. Lots of children can retell stories that they have read, but they cannot interpret those stories beyond a superficial level. They need some

instruction to help them learn to explore narrative more fully. When children seem unable to discover something on their own, I would argue that this is the time for some type of direct instruction. And by direct instruction I don't necessarily mean teacher-centered presentations, and certainly I do not mean a lot of decontextualized worksheets. Ironically, the kinds of mini-lessons advocated by some of the whole language experts seem to me to be exactly the type of instruction which could be productive. Modeling is another technique which can be considered direct instruction when it is used to illuminate some aspect of the literacy process which a student may not yet have comfortably mastered. In short, despite all of its proven advantages, simply reading and being exposed to good literature does not guarantee literacy. For many, perhaps most learners, a direct instruction component in literacy learning is key.

A second major area which is part of the mythology of the noninstruction myth of literacy development is writing. Primary among writing practice is the notion that all it takes to be a better writer is to be exposed to more literature and to write often. Legions of teachers are successfully doing journal writing with hundreds of thousands of children. Journal writing is terrific, but it is not a sufficient instructional component to ensure growth in writing. Even more than reading development, writing development cries out for some type of direct instruction. Although most of the writing gurus advocate direct mini-lessons addressing authentic needs which appear as children are writing, this part of writing instruction is often neglected. Children need direct instruction which helps them improve such elements as style, mechanics, or development of a piece of writing. Journals cannot be the main component of a program which seeks to develop student writing. Children must acquire some of the more sophisticated elements of writing. This warrants deviation from the nonteaching myth of writing instruction toward an integration of meaningful direct instruction with journal writing.

Both the nonteaching myth of reading and the nonteaching myth of writing have at their core the notion that exposure is enough. If you expose kids to enough high quality literature, they will read. If you give kids enough opportunity to put their thoughts into writing, they will develop into mature, capable writers. Some may; many won't. I think an analogy to piano playing is apt. Simply letting children hear great music and wonderful symphonies will not turn them into musicians. Even practicing their scales or practicing a song will not bring them very far along the road to competence. To be sure, practice and exposure will both help, but a good piano teacher, who can model a piece of music, demonstrate how to read music effectively, and explain how a piece of music is put together, can make the process accessible to more than merely those children who are musically gifted. In short, a good teacher is more than someone who creates wonderful opportunities, however enriching those opportunities might be.

Myths are useful as artifacts to help us understand the issues with which people struggle. However, myths are a detriment when they keep us from examining ourselves and our beliefs. We should not as a profession be afraid to explore and question our most cherished beliefs. It is only through doubt, exploration, and challenge that we grow.

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Practical Applications: Integrating Computers, Science and Literature

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The audience of second graders was mesmerized by the miniaturized multimedia show about opossums on the computer screen. The star, a "magical teaching tool," was *Mammals: A Multimedia Encyclopedia* produced by IBM, in conjunction with the National Geographic Society.

By transforming encyclopedic content, such as a body of information on mammals, into functional electronic media, a CD-ROM disk helped to motivate and inform our young readers. The students could not only see photographs, drawings, charts, maps, and a short video; but also they could read and print out articles.

Why do these eight–year–olds want to use an electronic encyclopedia rather than traditional reference books? Primarily because the information can be quickly accessed and printouts can be customized. As technology comes into our schools, the CD-ROM will play an increasingly prominent role in our children's education.

Our second graders' goal in the Media Center was to research opossums before reading Ellen Conford's charming possum stories. In all three of Conford's books, a possum character confronts a problem that is based on real opossum behavior.

With increased desire to have elementary school children experience authentic text, using the CD-ROM as a springboard, we were able to challenge the youngsters with a variety of reading and writing activities, often incorporating cooperative learning. This enabled students to see a relationship between scientific fact and children's literature. The Conford stories lent themselves very well to this integrated approach.

The students initially were asked to contribute what they knew about opossums to a class web. Several children knew opossums hang by their tails and stay up all night. However, many children had never seen a live opossum and knew little about this animal.

Then all 25 students visited the Media Center and were introduced to the *Mammals Encyclopedia* and the CD-ROM. They were surprised how easy it was to access. The students were able to see the geographic distribution of opossums on a world map, the relative size of this animal, pictures of the different kinds of opossums, an animation of opossums, and an informational printout from the disk.

Students wanted to know more! However, the *Mammals Encyclopedia* is suggested for grades 4 and up, and since the text was challenging for our second graders, six heterogeneous groups were made responsible for reading and webbing

two paragraphs of data. Each group then added their information to our class web. Because students had read and written the information together, they felt comfortable reporting orally to the class. After all six webs were combined into a mega web, the whole class generated headings for the subtopics.

With this kind of group process, the students were able to see how to make sense out of a body of scientific knowledge. By working in small cooperative groups with only one information sheet to share, the children had to work together. This gave a sense of commitment, which contributed to the success of the activity.

Then the children listened to the three Conford books, *Impossible Possum, Eugene the Brave,* and *Just the Thing for Geraldine*. They discussed the scientific facts Ms. Conford used in her stories. Would a possum be unable to hang by its tail? Would a nocturnal animal be afraid of the dark? They also told how the problem was solved and if it were real or fiction.

A culminating activity was to create an original opossum story. Students were instructed to incorporate a scientific fact and show how characters such as Randolph, Eugene, or Geraldine would solve a problem. The assignment was received enthusiastically, and each story focused on different opossum facts. Students clearly enjoyed sharing their individual stories in small groups. One example is given below.

Randolph Gets Sick

> One day Randolph woke up and felt terrible. He was very sick. His mother called the doctor, who was a turtle.
>
> "Oh, no," said the doctor. "Bring him in today. You know how little opossums like to play dead!" But there was a problem. The doctor's office was open only during the day, and Randolph was nocturnal! Every time he went to the doctor there was a sign that said, "Office closed for the night. Come back tomorrow."
>
> Finally, Randolph's mother made an appointment to see the owl doctor. You see, the owl is nocturnal, too!!!!!!

Finally, students acted as critics. Generally, they gave rave reviews to their classmates. The stories and illustrations were placed in a class book, which has been very popular and continues to be in constant circulation among the second graders.

This initial "outing" with CD-ROM technology has generated wide interest. Students now ask to access the scientific truth each time we meet a fictionalized mammal in their reading.

Look out, George and Martha!!!!!

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BOOK REVIEWS

Build a Literate Classroom, The Reading-Writing Teacher's Companion. Donald H. Graves. Portsmouth, New Hampshire. 1991. Paper. 198 pp. $12.50.

Donald Graves is not only an inspired educator, he is also an evangelist for literacy and the joy of writing. In *Build A Literature Classroom,* he offers a very personal and practical guide for supporting literacy in the classroom. Graves' style in this text is conversational, addressing the reader as "you" and describing many personal incidents he has experienced as both teacher and student. He encourages readers to discover their own literacy and to experiment with teaching/learning strategies in the classroom.

Build A Literature Classroom is the fourth book by Graves in the series, *The Reading/Writing Teacher's Companion*. Each book focuses on the reading/writing connection but with a different emphasis: non-fiction, fiction, poetry (in progress), and one's own literacy. This book is organized through a series of "action steps," designed to help teachers experiment with new literacy-enhancing strategies. The strategies range from classroom management techniques to ideas for personal literacy development, from ways to shorten writing conferences to ways to raise literary expectations for self and students.

Graves points out that in his own teaching, he works for the long haul, creating ways to help children become lifelong readers. Graves' own teaching and his suggestions in the text are based on well thought-out principles:

> Children learn by reading and writing for extensive amounts of time.
>
> Children learn the meaning of texts by sharing their work with others.
>
> Children learn by solving many kinds of problems in order to make their intentions clear.
>
> Children learn in an environment that expects challenge.
>
> Children learn from teacher demonstrations about reading, writing, and learning.
>
> Children learn because teachers demonstrate the use and meaning of many kinds of skills.
>
> Children learn because they take an active role in their own learning: planning, making effective choices, and evaluating their own work.

On one level, this is a very practical text with a format similar to a cookbook. Suggestions are given, for example, for teaching the conventions of capitalization

and punctuation. On the other hand, Graves is describing an ideal educational environment. He believes that a truly literate classroom is necessary to educate citizens for the 21st century. He clearly holds very high expectations for both educators and students and encourages teachers to be continually self-evaluating, consulting with colleagues, and accepting greater challenges.

In a literary classroom, each teacher is an outstanding classroom manager, carefully tuned to the needs, strengths, and progress of each student. One aspect of the management system is to keep careful records as part of an on-going evaluation process. Teachers need to be models of literacy for students, demonstrating thinking processes and skills in an explicit manner. Most importantly, teachers must continue to expand their own level of literacy.

It is easy for the classroom practitioner to feel overwhelmed by the many challenges. Teachers will have to narrow their focus and select only a few action steps from the many excellent choices available.

Harriet Peck
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Photo credit: Children's Book Council

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Rexford Brown, Schools of Thought: How the Politics of Literacy Shape Thinking in the Classroom. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. 1991. 290 pp. $24.95.

Rexford Brown has written a very readable and thought provoking book, *Schools of Thought: How the Politics of Literacy Shape Thinking in the Classroom*. Using the metaphor "A literacy of thoughtfulness" Brown investigates, through a series of case studies, the way policy imposed from above (state and local mandates) and policy imposed from within (beliefs individuals hold about the type of schooling that promotes success) influence what happens in classrooms. The overarching question in this book is whether current efforts to reform and restructure the educational system will foster what he calls a "new higher literacy" in all children. This new higher form of literacy includes the ability to think critically and creatively, to reason carefully, to inquire systematically into any important matter, and the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information and arguments.

Case studies are examined against this goal and are used to illustrate the obstacles that stand in the way. In the first case "Back to the basics in the rural south," Brown examines the way state mandated minimal competencies influence what teachers focus on in the classroom and how an increasing concern with higher-order thinking skills within the state has trouble gaining legitimacy in practice because it has to compete with the mandated basic skills notion of educational achievement. This first case sets one of the themes in the book: unexamined assumptions. The conception of learning embodied in a minimal competency approach is the philosophical opposite of that embodied in a critical thinking approach. Rationale for actions and policy often reflect a lack of awareness of these competing differences.

The second case focuses on a community within the same state founded by slaves after the Civil War and incorporated before the turn of the century. By external standards, the schools in this community are good. Eighty percent of the students graduate from high school against 45% average for the part of the state in which the community is located. Ninety–two percent go on to postsecondary school, even though 97% of the students qualify for free lunch. This is a Black community, governed by its members, and the community attributes the success to high expectations and positive professional role models. In this case, Brown seems to be suggesting that what is unexamined are the indicators of success. In the schools where the teaching model is recitation, he sees none of the engagement or meaning construction that are indicators of a literacy of thoughtfulness. "It strikes me that these students are acquiring a hand-me-down literacy. Embedded in it are values affirming that it is good to know these kinds of things, but they are someone else's values, someone else's affirmations, and they go unacknowledged and unquestioned. Passivity is also embedded in this hand-me-down literacy, as are conformity and notions about the relevance of grammar and English literature to success (p. 41).

Schools on an Indian Reservation are examined in the third case. The majority of

instruction reflects the recitation and decontextualized mode of learning. Brown questions whether this is the right curriculum for the reservation. One of the attractions of this chapter is the contrast of cultural ways of knowing with the mainstream version of education. This chapter carries out the theme introduced in "Hand-Me-Down Literacy" and moves it on. In the former case the culture accepts the values of traditional, recitation–based literacy, although Brown would wish that they would examine this acceptance. In "Language and Culture on the Reservations" this conventional wisdom doesn't work . . . and again the problem is one of lack of examination. Instead of looking for problems in the approach, educators look for reasons why it doesn't work in the students and the culture. However, some primary schools are breaking away from the recitation formula and not only embody Brown's notions of a literacy of thoughtfulness, but also incorporate cultural ways of knowing.

North Urban Public Schools explores the way a top heavy bureaucratic system polarized by court–ordered desegregation, operates against a literacy of thoughtfulness. Politics rather than educational substance characterizes the attention of the system and desegregation becomes the policy of educational concern. Good schools and good teachers exist, but they are in the margins and fight an upstream battle against a resistant system. A second theme gains focus in this section: the way equity has been conceptualized and enforced has frequently operated against intended purposes.

Brown spends some time analyzing the way national policy on equality of opportunity operates to impede rather than promote a literacy of thoughtfulness for all. Defining equity as everyone achieving the same minimal standards encourages low standards. Brown proposes a new conception of "fairness." Under this conception, all students would experience the same rich curriculum and absorb what each could. The concept would be one of "fullness." Such a concept would recognize individual differences within and across domains of knowledge. Thus, my capacity for calculus may be less than my capacity for literature, but I would be assured a rich curriculum in each area.

Brown argues that the purpose, function and language of policy are not totally compatible with the purpose, function, and language of learning. This natural incompatibility creates tension "which may be clear or unclear, healthy or unhealthy, productive or unproductive." North Urban Public Schools is characterized by unhealthy tension which operates against a thoughtful educational policy for children. "Central to a healthy tension between institution and practice is leaders' realization that the tension is there to begin with, cannot ultimately be resolved, and constantly needs to be understood and negotiated" (p. 148).

North Urban Public Schools is contrasted with another large urban system where the tensions are more healthy and where the system recognizes the challenge of a literacy of thoughtfulness and provides support for its development. Isolated cases of excellence existed in the other systems. These were bottom up efforts that existed because the system did not interfere or because individual belief persisted in spite of resistance. In the Pittsburgh system there is strong top down support for a literacy of thoughtfulness, but it is expensive. The system has spent 12.5 million dollars in teacher development over five years.

Even in this context, moving toward a higher literacy is difficult. There is safety in the Basics: minimal competencies that can be measured. Higher literacy must compete for "time and coverage" with the basics even for some. The notion of higher literacy for all is even more problematic. If everyone gets the same thing, many fear the curriculum will be diluted. Even with extensive staff development, it is hard for many teachers to abandon the recitation mode, the search for the teacher–determined "right answer," to share control with students, to facilitate and guide, taking the lead from students.

In the final chapter, Brown moves to Toronto, where Higher Literacy appears to be alive and well. Here we get a glimpse at policy that has the potential to support the "capacity" metaphor of equality proposed earlier. One difference is the way policy is framed and imposed. There is top down conceptualization but it is in the form of broad concepts to be mastered. The specifics and processes are to be worked out in the individual schools. The guidelines are in terms of robust educational outcomes rather than minimal competencies. Innovation at the local school level is highly supported. Policy incorporates child–centered beliefs about the way children learn and the type of environments that support this learning. Staff development focuses on these attitudes and beliefs. (In Pittsburgh, the focus was on technical aspects, how to engage in and lead discussions, etc.) The whole attitude toward children and learning is different. Toronto doesn't collect demographic data on minorities, children in poverty, and children on welfare. In the U.S. we feel this is necessary to "predict" children who may have problems learning from our curriculum and to budget for educational problems before the fact.

Can U.S. public schools promote a high literacy for all students? This is a very important question for American education. The world is changing rapidly and bringing with it an increased need for critical thinking and problem solving. At the same time, we are undergoing a great shift in population and life style. Toronto differs from the United States in its view of the nature of learning, the nature and value of cultural diversity, and in the way it conceptualizes and carries out policy.

Brown suggests that we might move toward policies that support higher literacy if we recognize the assumptions that underlie positions, the tensions that exist between positions and viewpoints and recognize that these tensions are natural. If we clearly acknowledge the assumptions and tensions arising from the contrasting positions represented in education today, then these tensions can lead to dialogue that stimulates inquiry, questioning, and problem solving.

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